

### DID YOU KNOW ...



The drugs that foreign pharmacies ship to Americans are not necessarily the same drugs that the foreign pharmacies dispense to their own customers?

It's true! In many foreign countries, drugs that are manufactured and used in that country are held to higher standards of quality and receive more rigorous testing than drugs that the country exports to the United States and elsewhere.

Not only do the laws of some foreign countries require fewer inspection checks, but also in some cases, the drugs are exported in a more or less pure chemical form. That means there is no guarantee that the active and non-active ingredients in the drugs that are shipped from foreign sources have the specific balance of ingredients that are prescribed for the patient in the U.S.

In the United States, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) requires both imported and exported drugs to meet the same high quality standards. Therefore, you can be assured that the medicines provided by regulated pharmacies have been inspected and are safe for consumer.

The FDA makes sure that all prescription drugs sold in the U.S. are safe and effective. If consumers import drugs from outside of the U.S., the FDA does not know what consumers are receiving.

### WHAT ELSE DO I NEED TO KNOW?



**SAFETY is not guaranteed:** Safety should be your first concern. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) does not know the source of the medications that come from foreign countries. Your health is too important to sacrifice safety.

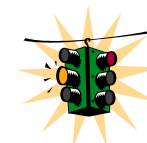
**QUALITY assurance is not guaranteed:** Drugs from other countries may not meet the same quality standards that U.S. drugs meet. Medications that have not been approved for sale in the U.S. are not always manufactured using quality assurance procedures that assure safe and effective products.

**Drug PURITY is not guaranteed:** Some imported medications and their ingredients, although legal in foreign countries, may not have been evaluated for safety and effectiveness in the U.S. These products may be addictive or contain other dangerous substances.

**Lack of information is DANGEROUS to health:** An imported medication may lack information that would permit you to be promptly and correctly treated for a dangerous side effect caused by the drug.

**Cost can be MISLEADING:** Medications from abroad may be cheaper than the drugs in the U.S. However, the quality and safety of drugs are not known. If you have adverse reactions from a medication, you may have to pay more in unnecessary costs for medical care.

### WHAT ELSE DO I NEED TO KNOW?



**Unsupervised use is RISKY:** Some medications, whether imported or not, are unsafe when taken without adequate medical supervision. A medical evaluation is required to ensure that a drug is appropriate for you and your condition. Your pharmacist can counsel you on the proper use of medications and identify drug interactions. Patients should be counseled on every medication before purchasing it to prevent possible harm.

**Some drugs are COUNTERFEIT:** Some imported medications – even those that bear the name of a U.S. approved product – may, in fact, be counterfeit versions that are unsafe or even completely ineffective.

**Label and language ignorance could cause HARM:** Medication labels, including instructions for use and possible side effects, may be in a language you do not understand, which could lead to misuse of the drug. Also, imported drug labels may make medical claims or suggest specific uses that have not been proven by U.S. standards.

### IS IT LEGAL TO BUY MEDICATIONS FROM FOREIGN COUNTRIES?



In most cases, it is illegal in the U.S. to buy medications from abroad. You are probably breaking a law if you buy medications from another country.

## WHAT SHOULD I WORRY ABOUT?



One of the most important disadvantages of buying imported drugs is that it can prevent relationships between licensed U.S. pharmacists and consumers. Pharmacists are valuable members of the health care team who can counsel and educate consumers on their medications. They know their customers' drug histories, can review consumers' drug lists and catch possible drug interactions.

Imported medications can be expired, contaminated, and/or counterfeited. In the spring of 2002, undercover agents recovered more than 25,000 counterfeit Viagra pills in New York. All counterfeit Viagra contained different amounts of the actual drug. The counterfeit Viagra did not look any different from the original pills.

## WHAT IS THE GOVERNMENT DOING TO HELP?



Lawmakers are reviewing several ways to reduce the cost of prescription drugs while still insuring quality.

One way proposed is to make drug exporters perform certain tests to insure that the medications sold directly to U.S. consumers are as safe as those that are manufactured and sold by U.S. pharmacies. Though a good idea, the price of the foreign drugs would likely increase because manufacturers would be required to spend more money to test the medications for safety.

## INTERNET PHARMACY



Consumers should beware of Internet pharmacies from foreign countries. Look for the VIPPS emblem -Verified

Internet Pharmacy Practice Sites – to ensure that the on-line pharmacy accessed meets state and federal requirements for safe pharmacy practices by the website.

## IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS

- **The Consumer Protection Agency**  
410-576-6550
- **Maryland Pharmacy Assistance Program**  
410-767-5398  
[www.dhmf.state.md.us/mma/mpap/](http://www.dhmf.state.md.us/mma/mpap/)
- **Maryland Poison Center**  
800-222-1222 \* 410-706-1858 (TDD)  
[www.pharmacy.umaryland.edu/~mpc/](http://www.pharmacy.umaryland.edu/~mpc/)
- **Division of Drug Control (DDC)**  
410-764-2890 ([www.dhmf.state.md.us/labs](http://www.dhmf.state.md.us/labs))
- **Food and Drug Administration (FDA)**  
410-962-3396 ([www.fda.gov](http://www.fda.gov))
- **Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA)**  
410-962-7580 ([www.dea.gov](http://www.dea.gov))

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# BUYING DRUGS FROM FOREIGN COUNTRIES

## WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW



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